



WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF
Natural Resources
Peter Goldmark - Commissioner of Public Lands

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Washington and Idaho provide status of Douglas-fir tussock moth defoliation

(BOISE) – For the past two years, forest landowners in Washington and Idaho have experienced an outbreak of native Douglas-fir tussock moth caterpillars, affecting overall forest health in areas of the two states and potentially impacting activities occurring on those forested lands.

The states of Washington and Idaho today released a status update on the outbreak.

Outcome of agency surveys

In the summer of 2011, the Idaho Department of Lands (IDL), the Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR), and the U.S. Forest Service detected new areas with defoliation in Idaho and Washington. Kootenai, Benewah, and Latah counties in Idaho and Spokane, Columbia, and Garfield counties in Washington are affected.

Through aerial surveys, the agencies mapped defoliated forests across approximately 68,000 acres in northern Idaho, more than 1,600 acres in eastern Spokane County, and 7,800 acres in Columbia and Garfield counties.

The defoliated area in northern Idaho has increased significantly from the 8,500 acres mapped in 2010, and the affected area in Spokane County has more than doubled since 2010.

Specific areas affected in Washington are Mica Peak, Tekoa Mountain, and Gelbert Mountain in Spokane County and light defoliation in the Umatilla National Forest wilderness area of the Blue Mountains.

Areas with defoliation in Idaho include the Signal Point area south of Post Falls, much of the Coeur d'Alene Indian Reservation in the vicinity of Plummer and Worley, and the McCroskey State Park area of Benewah and Latah Counties.

Ground surveys for new egg masses in Benewah County, the Coeur d'Alene Indian Reservation, and the McCroskey State Park areas indicate that defoliation in those areas may spread and increase in severity in the summer of 2012.

In Spokane County and the Signal Point areas, however, low numbers of new egg masses and evidence of virus-killed caterpillars suggest the outbreak in these areas is likely to collapse in 2012.

In the spring of 2012, the agencies will analyze egg masses collected throughout the affected areas in both states to identify locations where there may be enough virus to cause a collapse of the caterpillar population.

Douglas-fir tussock moth populations run in cycles, dropping for a period of years between major outbreaks. The last outbreak in the northern Idaho-Washington State border area was 2000 to 2002. Outbreaks typically collapse within two to four years due to a buildup of natural enemies, such as a viral disease and parasites.

During winter and spring, new tussock moth egg masses and old cocoons can be found on the underside of tree branches and structures such as building overhangs and fences. New defoliation damage becomes most noticeable in July and is often worst in the tops of trees.

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Effects of Douglas-fir tussock moth caterpillar outbreak

The damage primarily affects grand fir, Douglas-fir, and some subalpine fir. The agencies outlined some important information about the issue:

- Recreation may be affected in areas with tussock moth because the hairs found on caterpillars, cocoons, and egg masses are a skin irritant to many people.
- Defoliation damage can reduce growth, cause top-kill, and may predispose some trees to attack by bark beetles.
- Caterpillars feed on both new and old foliage.
- Repeated defoliation is most damaging to trees.
- Defoliated trees observed in the summer and fall are not necessarily dead.
- If a tree is able to form buds that survive the winter, needles will develop in the spring.

Management options and landowner assistance

IDL is planning two public meetings in Plummer, Idaho, in late February to provide information and assistance options to Idaho landowners. Details about the meetings will be provided at a later date.

A combination of careful tree thinning and, where appropriate, the application of labeled insecticides can reduce tree damage and may prevent an outbreak's spread.

To help forest and woodlot property owners evaluate management options, DNR and IDL staff members can provide assistance to property owners in the affected areas who observe Douglas-fir tussock moth egg masses or tree damage.

Detailed information about how to recognize Douglas-fir tussock moth damage are available at the DNR and IDL Web sites, along with maps and images:

Washington State: <http://1.usa.gov/2z8nkG>

Idaho: <http://1.usa.gov/yyCKDb>

To report tussock moth damage or to obtain more information, landowners are encouraged to contact their state's forest entomologist:

Washington: Glenn Kohler (DNR forest entomologist), 360-902-1342, glenn.kohler@dnr.wa.gov

Idaho: Tom Eckberg (IDL forest entomologist), 208-666-8625, teckberg@idl.idaho.gov.

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